Two Perspectives, One Shahrazad: Turkisch Poetry and One Thousand and One Nights

Dermikol, Neslihan ; Kalpaklı, Mehmet

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NESLİHAN DEMİRKOL (UNIVERSITY OF MÜNSTER) AND MEHMET KALPAKLI (BİLKENT UNIVERSITY)

Sezai Karakoç and Gülten Akın are two prominent figures of Turkish poetry, but although Karakoç and Akın are of the same generation, they have opposing worldviews; therefore, each addresses a different audience. Our aim is to analyse their poems as reflections of *One Thousand and One Nights* in modern Turkish poetry. The poems in question are written in different periods: Karakoç wrote his poem in 1953, while Akın wrote hers in 2007. Despite having differing objectives, we believe that these two poems—both entitled 'Shahrazad'—give a glimpse of how the *Nights* are digested by Turkish literary circles. First, in order to position the *Nights* in Turkish literature, and the poets within the realm of Turkish poetry, this chapter briefly outlines the historical frame through which we can make sense of these poems. It then introduces Sezai Karakoç and Gülten Akın, and proceeds to a close reading of the poems. Last but not least, based on a close reading of the poems, some arguments are provided about how and why the *Nights* has had an effect on modern Turkish poetry.

The international academic community has reached a consensus that the *Nights* is a masterpiece of and a significant contribution of Arabic literature to world literature. Hence the influence of the *Nights* has been mostly discussed with reference to

Arabic texts, as they are the oldest known manuscripts, and the sources of Antoine Galland's translation. Naturally, the Ottoman Turkish versions, adaptations, and translations of the *Nights* are generally overlooked.[1] However, they have a long history in Ottoman Turkish; the earliest known translation of the *Nights* into Ottoman Turkish dates back to the fifteenth century, and is located in İnebey Manuscript Library in Bursa. The Bursa Municipality published this manuscript in 2016 as a volume that includes introductory articles about the manuscript, a facsimile, and a transliteration of the manuscript's text into the modern Turkish alphabet, ornamented with charming miniatures (Eğri ed. 2016). The well-known Beyânî manuscript dates back to 1636, and is a part of the manuscript collection of the Biblothèque Nationale de France in Paris. Şinasi Tekin's article on this manuscript, and its marginalia, gives us a hint about how popular and admirable these stories were among readers in Istanbul (1993: 240–241, 244). In his memoire about Istanbul, Antoine Galland mentions stories in circulation among Ottoman readers, such as *Forty Morns and Eves*, *İskendernâme,* and stories of consolation in the style of *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda*, which were among the adaptations of *Nights*. His testimony provides us with an insight into the popularity of tales within the Ottoman community (1881: 242).

There has been a continued interest in the *Nights* in the Late Ottoman era as well. We may mention, for instance, *Muhayyelât-ı Aziz Efendi* (The Imaginations of Aziz Efendi), written in the late eighteenth century as one of the early texts of the modern era which took its inspiration from this story compilation. In the foreword to his "imaginations", the author Aziz Efendi states

[1] Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a list of works by international scholars dealing with *One Thousand and One Nights* in Turkish, we feel obliged to mention some of these esteemed scholars who have drawn attention to the Turkish translations as well as interactions between Turkish literature and *One Thousand and One Nights* such as Marzolph, Leeuwen, and Wassouf 2004, Leeuwen 2007, Thomann 2016, Chraïbi 2016, Marzolph 2017, and Leeuwen 2018.

that he has discovered a book entitled *Hülâsâtü'l Hayâl* ('The Essence of Fantasy'), a book that was in the fashion of the *Nights* and Lami'i Çelebi's *İbretnâme* (1526)[2], and decided to create his own version of it (1999: 1). Andreas Tietze draws our attention to the intertextual relationships of *Muhayyelât* with the *Nights*, *One Thousand and One Days* and *al-Farac ba'd al-shidda* (1948). Gonca Gökalp also points out the structural and narrative similarities, along with the similarities between *Muhayyelât* and the *Nights*, considering the former to be a pioneering example of the modern Turkish novel (1999: 187–188). Following the proliferation of printing press technology throughout the Ottoman territories in the nineteenth century, translations and anthologies of, as well as selections from the *Nights* were published in different scripts and languages of the empire. The first printed translation—from Arabic into Ottoman Turkish—of the *Nights* was that by Ahmet Nazif Efendi, first published in 1842–1850 in six volumes, and later in 1870 in four volumes (Acaroğlu 1988: 14). Within the new Turkish Republic period, many different translations of the *Nights* were published; these were mostly from French and rarely from English, a fact that remains true to this day. Therefore, we can safely allege that the *Nights* has always been a well-known text and in circulation among the Ottoman audience and modern Turkish readers alike. However, there have only been few literary studies concerning the influences of Turkish translations of the *Nights*.

Current studies focus mainly on the manuscript tradition, the linguistics of Ottoman Turkish, and the influences of the *Nights* on Turkish oral and folk literature.[3] There are also bibliographies of the *Nights* in Turkish, based on the translations into

[2] A compilation of moral stories and anecdotes about Sufism by Lamîi Çelebi (d. 1532), a well-known Ottoman Divan poet.

[3] For a linguistic analyses of the Bursa manuscript see Tor 1994; Tor 2010; for translations of the *Nights* by Armenian community in Ottoman era see Koz 2010; for the influence of the *Nights* on Anatolian-Turkish tales and fairy tales see Akkoyunlu 1982; Akkoyunlu 2012 and Nazlı 2011.

Turkish, addressing their influences on modern Turkish literature as well as Turkish cinema (Acaroğlu 1988; Birkalan-Gedik 2004; Tülücü 1998; Kalpaklı and Demirkol 2014). In terms of its influence on modern Turkish literature, we can mention *Kara Kitap* (*Black Book*) (1990) by Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, which has an intertextual relation to the *Nights*; *On the Road to Baghdad* by Turkish-American author, Güneli Gün, which was a 'picaresque novel of magical adventures begged, borrowed and stolen from the Thousand and One Nights' (1991: 1); and *Uykuların Doğusu* (East of Sleeps) (2009) by Hasan Ali Toptaş, which was introduced as 'an endless story just like *One Thousand and One Nights*'. With regards to classical Ottoman literature, research uncovers brief mentions of the *Nights* in the classical tradition of story-telling. Yet, we do not come across any comprehensive study of this. In short, the number of national studies about the influences of the *Nights* on Ottoman or modern Turkish literature falls short of expectations.

Three explanations can be put forward regarding the national literary circles' indifference towards this issue. The first of these is related to the modernisation and nationalisation process in Turkey. It is obvious that this paradigm shift not only affected political and social systems, but also reshaped the cultural and academic environment. Therefore—on the basis of Benedict Anderson's ground-breaking study about the relationship between nation building, modern literature, and print culture—we can make this assumption about the Turkish case: on the backdrop of the newly emerging nation state, it would not be logical to expect the literary studies to primarily engage in scrutinizing a piece of 'foreign' work, which does not constitute a genuine part of the national identity. Moreover, this 'foreign' literary text fundamentally belongs to the 'East', a quality that the new state was trying to eliminate from the new national identity. For the founding principles of the modern Turkish state, anything borrowed, adopted, or adapted from Arab or Persian cultures, languages, or literatures should be perceived as 'foreign'. Accordingly, it would be suitable to anticipate an increase in antipathy towards the *Nights*.

Another reason for such indifference may be the reaction to supernatural features within traditional tales. The foundation of the criticism of Ottoman classical literature in the second half of the nineteenth century was that it had no connection with reality. The obsession with reality among literary circles was a result of social and cultural changes. In a period when industrialisation was accelerated by scientific discoveries and society was driven by the new rules depicted by this new way of life, 'imaginary' and 'extraordinary' tales appeared irrelevant and even childish.[4] This may also explain the change in the Turkish title of the *Nights* in the twentieth century. While during the Ottoman period these stories were referred to as 'tales' (*ḥikâyât*), the publishers of the new republic referred to them as 'fairy tales' (*maṣal*) so as to emphasize the unrealistic and exotic aspect of the *Nights,* and perhaps to categorize them among children's literature. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, a prominent novelist and a meticulous literary historian of Turkish literature, writes about the

[4] In the second half of nineteenth century, Turkish literary circles witnessed vivid literary discussions concerning the new path to be taken by Turkish literature. The progressive cadres of literature, such as Şinasi, Ziya Paşa, Namık Kemal, Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem, heavily criticized the classical Ottoman literature for being deeply influenced by Arabic and Persian languages and literatures, and thus for not serving the purpose of "educating the people". Ziya Paşa's famous article 'Şiir ve İnşa' (Poetry and Prose) (1868), Namık Kemal's *Tahrib-i Harabat* (Destruction of Ruins) (1874), and the well-known discussion in the early 1880s between Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem and Muallim Naci about new poetry can all be cited in this respect. For more, see Şahin 2008; Donbay 2010; Tökel 1998. The critic of Ottoman poetry is not limited to these examples. The highly influential Turkologist and founding figure of modern literary studies in the early republican era, M. Fuad Köprülü, also constructed his discourse concerning Ottoman poetry taking a dismissive approach, see Köprülü 1924. Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar were two other influential literary historians of the early republican era, who also criticized the classical Ottoman poetry for not being realistic; see Gölpınarlı 1945 and Tanpınar 2003.

role of 'wonders' in Turkish tales with reference to the *Nights*, and argues that the element of wonders in these stories prevents the protagonist from being left to her fate, and does not allow for a dramatic plot (2003: 26–27).Thus, we can infer that in Turkey, the *Nights* have not been taken as serious works of literature by the academic circles of the modern era.

The third reason for the *Nights* being largely overlooked is also related to the definition of national literatures. Since national languages are deemed definitive, national literary studies have the tendency to exclude translations from the national literary canon. From the perspective of national literatures, anything not produced originally in the national language does not deserve any particular attention, because translation can only be a secondary product, an 'imitation', a 'copy' of the original. We are not going to embark here on a discussion about how and when a work belongs to a certain national literature, and we are not going to give a historical account of cultural paradigm shifts in translation studies, either. However, it is important to emphasize that it is possible that the *Nights* have not received as much academic attention as they deserve due to being a 'translated' work.

Let us start by indicating that despite the long history the *Nights* enjoyed in Turkish, the themes and/or traces of them are prevalent neither in classical Ottoman poetry nor in folk poetry. Shahrazad and Shahriyar are absent as themes, characters, or images from Ottoman poetry. The main reason for this appears to be that Ottoman poetry (both folk and classical) has its own repertoire of symbols, metaphors, and characters. In classical poetry in particular, even in the genre of masnavi—tales in poetry form—the set of symbols, metaphors, and characters is very limited.[5]

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[5] Scanning İskender Pala's *Ansiklopedik Divan Şiiri Sözlüğü* (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Divan Poetry) and Ahmet Talat Onay's *Açıklamalı Divan Şiiri Sözlüğü: Eski Türk Edebiyatında Mazmunlar ve İzahı* (Annotated Dictionary of Divan Poetry: Poetic Themes in Old Turkish Literature

It seems necessary to briefly refer to the general features of Ottoman poetry for a better understanding of our argument. In Ottoman poetry, both in folk and classical poetry, the main theme was love. The theme of love might be observed in different forms, such as mystical or secular. In most cases, love comes with many layers of meaning, representing the profane beloved, and the heavenly celestial one, God, simultaneously. Accordingly, the main dynamic of the poem revolves around the relationship between the lover and the beloved. Generally speaking, the beloved is unattainable and the lover restlessly tries to attract the attention of the beloved, confronts all kinds of obstacles, ceaselessly suffers, and increasingly, embraces his/her anguish as a blessing and *raison d'être*.[6]

In classical Ottoman poetry, the lover and the beloved are anonymous. In masnavis, the characters inevitably have names, but the repertoire of female and male protagonists is almost always fixed; including but not limited to Layla and Majnun, Khosrow/Farhad and Shirin, Yusuf and Zulaykha, Süheyl and Nevbahâr (Kavruk and Pala 1998: 491–493.). Folk tales per se, entail characters from masnavis, or some additional, *sui generis* ones, such as Kerem and Aslı, Tahir and Zühre, Arzu and Kamber, Emrah and Selvihan (Türkmen 1998: 489–490). However, in none of these traditions are Shahrazad or Shahriyar referred to, since the *Nights* is not a typical representation of a love story or an affair as described above. Shahrazad and Shahriyar's story is narrated in a more realistic setting: Shahriyar is no lover, but a ruler, and Shahrazad is no beloved, but a subject. Hence, it was not possible for Ottoman poetry to find a way to bring these two characters into its repertoire.

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and their Explanations) would be a simple means of cross-checking the validity of this assumption. None of these works refer to *One Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrazad or Shahriyar as poetic themes or motifs.

[6] The social, cultural and mystic references of this poetry are beyond the scope of this chapter, but for more information see Andrews 1985 as well as Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005.

In the light of these points, the 'Shahrazad' poems of Sezai Karakoç and Gülten Akın, two prominent poets of modern Turkish literature, should definitely be considered as a novel poetic theme. Consequently, we consider these poems not as reuse or reclamation of tradition, but as creation of tradition. They perform the introduction of a brand new theme, symbol, or protagonist to modern Turkish poetry. Our research on modern Turkish poetry endorses this claim: the corpus of Turkish poetry we reviewed showed that the references to the *Nights* or its characters occur predominantly after the 1950s. There is, for example, Hilmi Yavuz's 'a, ş, k (bir)' (l, o, v, e [one]) (2007: 407) and Akgün Akova's 'Leyla' (2006: 26–27). Interestingly, both poets mention the *Nights* or Shahrazad in relation to Layla. In Hilmi Yavuz's poem we read:

[…]	[…]
sen Leyla'dan daha Leyla	you are more Layla than Layla
verdiğin yanıtlar için	To your answers
sorular aradım, sorular mı,	I tried to find questions, questions or
akşamlar mı, arada kaldım…	evenings, I am torn apart…
alışır mıydım, alışırdım	would I get used to it, I would
elf leyle ve leyle…	*elf leyle ve leyle…*
[…]	[…][7]

And in Akgün Akova's 'Leyla', the poet calls Layla for a new beginning:

> […]
> her şeye yeniden başla Leyla
> Binbir Gece Masallarını anlatmaya,
> ----------Şehrazat'ın bir köleden gebe kaldığı için bıraktığı yerden
> […]
>
> […]
> Start everything anew Layla
> Restart telling The Tales of One Thousand and One Nights,
> ----------from the point Shahrazad stopped, because

[7] The translation is ours.

she became pregnant by a slave
[…][8]

Shahrazad also appears in two poems by Ece Ayhan: in one of these implicitly, and in the other explicitly. Ece Ayhan, yet another prominent poet and an important figure in the avant-garde poetry of the 1950s, refers to the *Nights* in his 'Ortodoksluklar-XIII' (1994: 155) and calls for a male Shahrazad in his 'Ala Ala Hey' (1994: 39). Also, in his prose piece 'Şiir Alınlıkları Üzerine' (1994: 53), he depicts a boy working on a fairy tale entitled 'Sultan of Mavera-Un-Nahr'. Here, the boy convinces himself that Shahrazad is male. Oğuz Demiralp interprets the word 'Shahrazad' as an intersection of two meanings, referring both to the homosexuality and the authorship of the protagonist (1995: 30). Erdoğan Kul, in his article inquiring into the mythological and tale-like elements of Ece Ayhan's poems, also concludes that all these references to Shahrazad are in fact a representation of and a metaphor for the poet himself (2011: 77–78, 81).

Before delving into our two poems of choice, we would like to offer brief portraits of Sezai Karakoç and Gülten Akın. Sezai Karakoç is among the outstanding poets of modern Turkish literature. Born in 1933, his interest in poetry started early in life, publishing his first poem in 1949. He spent some time in the capital of the new Turkish Republic, Ankara, while studying at the Faculty of Political Sciences there (Yalçın 2010b: 586–587). His foundation years of literary production overlapped with the Turkish avant-garde poetry movement, namely İkinci Yeni (literally, 'The Second New'). Thus, his poems have some similarities in terms of form and style with this avant-garde poetry movement. However, in terms of content, the source of his poetry is very different from this new circle of poets. The main difference between Sezai Karakoç and the avant-garde poets in question is his attitude towards the poetic tradition. Karakoç has a strong sense of tradition and he argues that it is tradition, which leads a poet to the poem. Thus, any poet disregarding or

[8] The translation is ours.

rejecting the poetic tradition is bound to perish (2012: 107–114). He considers Ottoman poetry to be the classical poetry of Turkish literature, and claims that it should be the source of modern poetry. He criticises the rejection of classical Ottoman poetry by the literary milieu, an attitude that emerged in the nineteenth century with the Ottoman modernisation project and continued into newly established republic's modernisation process. He maintains that modern poetry cannot be in the form of classical poetry, but stresses that it should have the same essence and spirit (2016: 10–14). According to Karakoç, poetry is composed of archetypes and leitmotivs. In the course of history, in accordance with the spirit of the time, these archetypes and leitmotivs are to be represented in ever new ways. As a matter of fact, the collection and classification of these archetypes and leitmotivs constitutes the tradition of poetry. What a poet should do is both to regenerate these archetypes and leitmotivs and add new ones to them. The traditional style should also be revised and re-formatted (2012: 115–121).

Sezai Karakoç is a true believer and an ideologist of Islam and Islamic culture, claiming that Islamic culture and civilisation should be interpreted anew and retain its dominance in contemporary life. The foundation of his poetic and political stance is based on the adaptation and 'resurrection' of Islamic culture in line with modern times. He argues that the poet, or himself as a poet, must break the chains of every kind of modern social bond and act against social codes. He must be an actor for social change, which will lead to the dominance of 'pure Islam' above the contemporary social codes and bonds (2012: 31–54).

Gülten Akın was also born in 1933, and graduated from the Faculty of Law in Ankara in 1956. She published her first poem in 1951, and like Karakoç's, her poems were published in the long era of the new avant-garde poetry, the Second New movement, but she kept herself separate from them. We can divide her poetry into three defined stages: The first was between the late 1950s and 1960s, when the main themes of her poems were solitude, desolation, and distrust. The second phase was throughout the 1970s, during which Akın mostly wrote about the social position of the individual, rural people, and the histor-

ical and political reasons for immigration. The last of these three periods began in the late 1980s, continuing into the 2000s. The poems written in this phase reflect the story of an individual who has given up on society, maintaining an anxious spirit, trying to resist despite the loss of hope and faith in society (Yalçın 2010b: 62–63).

Gülten Akın adopted a Marxist perspective and social realism as the thematic core of her poetry. Her leftist identity is so dominant that although most of her poems are specifically about women, she refused to be identified as a 'female poet' or a 'feminist'. In her study, Ruken Alp scrutinises the elements of female sensibility in Akın's poetry and states that it gives voice to suppressed women in an oppressive patriarchal society, which prevents women from self-realisation. According to Alp, the female figures of Akın's poetry feel confined by social life, marriage, political system, old age, and religion (2007: 109–110).

Akın expects the poet to play a role in society, to fulfil some sort of function. According to her, the basic dynamic between the poet and society is a dialectical relationship where one changes and influences the other (2001: 153–157). Correspondingly, she indicates that her poetry is rooted in folk literature and folk poems, since to her, the Turkish poetic tradition involves pragmatism. Unlike Karakoç, she does not consider the classical Ottoman poetry as the heritage of modern poets. To her, classical Ottoman poetry is the epitome of nobility and does not bear any prospect for the present and the future, while folk literature is a living, vivid tradition full of new prospects of style and form (2001: 56–62). She skilfully adapts formal and metaphoric features of epics and tales in her poems, while creating an authentic style of her own. Her poems dwell upon themes ranging from the problems of women to philosophical questions, from social issues to oppression and torment.

As mentioned above, Karakoç and Akın are poles apart in terms of ideological, cultural, and poetic stances. At one of these

poles we have ‘Şehrazat’ (2013: 11) of Karakoç, a poem written in 1953 and first published in 1957.[9]

Sen gecenin gündüzün dışında	You... beyond day and night
Sen kalbin atışında kanın akışında	You... in the heart’s beating and the flow of blood
Sen Şehrazat bir lâmba bir hükümdar bakışında	You... Shahrazad, a lamp in the gaze of a ruler
Bir ölüm kuşunun feryadını duyarsın	You hear the wailing of a death-bird
Sen bir rüya geceleyin gündüzün	You...a dream by day and by night
Sen bir yağmur ince hazin	You... a rain, fine and sorrowful
Sen şarkılarca büyük uzun	You... large and long as songs
Sen yolunu kaybeden yolcuların üstüne	You are a lifetime of snow, pouring down for a lifetime
Bir ömür boyu yağan bir ömür boyu karsın	On travellers, who have lost their ways
Sen merhamet sen rüzgâr sen tiril tiril kadın	You… compassion, you... wind, you... gossamer woman
Sen bir mahşer içinde en aziz yalnızlığı yaşadın	You lived the dearest saintly solitude amidst a judgement day
Sen başını çeviren cellatbaşının günü	You... the day of the chief executioner who turns his head away
Sen öyle ki sen diye diye seni anlayamayız	You... it is such that, we cannot understand you when we say ‘you’
Şehrazat ah Şehrazat Şehrazat	Shahrazad, ah Shahrazad, Shahrazad
Sen sevgili sen can sen yarsın	You are the beloved, you are the soul, you are the friend

What strikes us first is that the poet positions Shahrazad in a fairy tale-like environment. In the first stanza, Shahrazad is located out of the realm of the real world, as in a dream, but also at close proximity to the poet, as though she has no individual identity of her own. This image is strengthened in the second

[9] The translation is ours. We owe special thanks to Prof Walter G. Andrews for his contributions to the translation.

stanza with references to 'dream', 'rain', 'songs', and 'snow'. Free from terrestrial temporalities, transcending human qualities, and almost penetrating under the skin of the poet, Shahrazad turns into something else, but what? A character of a tale can appear in many forms, so let us try to establish what Shahrazad turns into by looking into the rest of the poem. After the first two lines, we have a better positioning of the protagonist. We see her in a very familiar space: most probably in the room with Shahriyar, under threat of death. Every time Shahriyar fixes his gaze on her, she becomes defenceless in the face of this masculine threat and she hears the footsteps of the prospect of death: she seems to be prey.

In the second stanza, the description of Shahrazad depicts an even more delicate, vulnerable, and defenceless creature. Despite being called a dream, rain, a song or snow, the attributes these things carry make it clear for the reader that Shahrazad has no power. The only action she is capable of is to snow on top of the travellers, not bothering or freezing them, but rather covering them like a soft blanket.

The first line of the last stanza consolidates this image of Shahrazad. In addition to her delicacy, as a continuation of the second stanza's last line, her nurturing and merciful character is illustrated. She is almost endowed with sainthood on behalf of her loneliness, which brings to mind the Sufi dervishes' reclusion and suffering. The last line declares clearly how the poet conceives her, namely as a beloved one.

In light of these features, we claim that in Karakoç's poem, Shahrazad transforms into a saintly figure. Thus, the image of Shahrazad is mostly aligned with traditional gender assumptions. In this poem, Shahrazad is nothing but an object of social construction and compared to 'angels', deemed to be delicate creatures to be protected or threatened by men. The image of Shahrazad here is a pure representation of Karakoç's ideology and corresponds with other female figures in his poetry. In accordance with his conservative worldview, he reflects a traditional or mystical image of women in his poems. Nebiye Arı states that, in his poems, Karakoç highlights the conventionally assumed qualities of women: motherhood and honour. He also

employs frequently celebrated characters, such as Saint Mary, known for their virtuousness (2011: 41). Some traditional characters, for instance Layla, also appear in his poems. He even wrote a modern version of Layla and Majnun in masnavi form. Arı also reminds us that despite being an advocate of Islamic reform, Karakoç is against modern, liberal, or feminist definitions of womanhood and criticises women who leave their houses and duties as mothers, and accuses them of the death of household and family life (2011: 43). Therefore, the Shahrazad in his poem is a proper representation of a saintly female figure in Karakoç's literary world.

At the other pole, we have Akın's 'Şehrazad' (2007: 21–22), a thoroughly different representation. Akın's 'Şehrazad' was published, rather recently, in 2007. In general, it shows traces of the third phase of her poetry; in other words, we have a daunted but resolute figure in the poem. Many times, Akın constructs the backbone of her poems with alternate references to herself and other people. As with her other poems, in 'Şehrazad', Akın refers to herself and becomes a part of the poem. In the end, it becomes hard to distinguish Shahrazad and Akın from one another, and to tell whose story we are reading.

Şehrazad o binbir kara geceden	Shahrazad, out of those thousand and one dark nights
ulaştı masalsı aydınlığa	reached a fairytalelike light
sesler rüzgâra sığındı	voices took refuge in the wind
onunla uçtu uzağa	and flew far away with her
içinde kendine çevrik bir ok	in you, an arrow, turned back on yourself
sen acemi durdun	you stood awkwardly,
avcısın, ya hiç yakalayamadın	you are a hunter, either you could not catch anything
ya tuttuğun kaydı elinden hızla	or whatever you caught slipped quickly from your hands
acıyla sınandın, övgüyle sınandın	you were tested by pain, you were tested by praise
benzettiler, etiketler	they compared you, labels
"gördüm, gördüm" dedi kimileri	"I saw her, I saw her" some of

	them said
“aylası vardı”	“she had a halo”
sardın sarmaladın elde kalanı	you bundled and wrapped up the left-overs
bitimsiz geceye sakladın	saved them for an endless night
şimdi hepsi düştü	now it was all a dream
Gülten gizde kaldın	Gülten you were left in mystery
[…]	[…]
ince tülbentlerden süzdümdü onu	I had strained her through fine muslin
sen nerde katıldın katı ve kalın	How were you mixed in, solid and viscous[10]

The first stanza of the poem provides the reader with a summary of Shahrazad’s life. Surviving ‘one thousand and one dark nights’, this Shahrazad also finds herself in a mythical environment, a kind of heaven. However, the rest of the poem provides details about that ‘one thousand and one dark nights’ and relates how she ended up there, from Shahrazad’s perspective.

The second stanza begins with a reference to Shahrazad’s self-sacrificial act. Hesitant and doubtful about what to do, Shahrazad still positions herself before danger. However, this act of self-sacrifice does not carry connotations of traditional womanhood but a sense of something stronger, especially when she is called a ‘hunter’. Shahrazad is expected to fulfil the role of prey: sleep with Shahriyar and die; or metaphorically be hunted. Yet, the Shahrazad of the poem is not a passive character: she refuses to be prey and instead tries to become a hunter, even though she does not know how this is to be done. Thus, she becomes a hunter who cannot hunt, and who has never kept what she hunted. She has been tested in different ways. These are all

[10] The translation is ours. We owe special thanks to Prof Walter G. Andrews for his contributions to the translation.

tricks of society, to mould her the way it sees fit. That is why she is forced to be, or at least be labelled as tame, saintly, and pure. This is as if to say she is pushed to adopt the true nature of a woman. Thus through 'one thousand and one dark nights', she tries to gather her strength and fight against traditional roles in a realm in which she is inexperienced and all alone.

However, all of her efforts are in vain. The third stanza is a declaration of Shahrazad's defeat by society. Whatever she gains in terms of her strength, she has to give up, as 'it was all a dream' to oppose society. If we recall the first stanza once again, Shahrazad, 'reached a fairytalelike light'. Considering these points, we can infer that the end of the tale, 'marriage', was the 'fairytalelike light', but from Shahrazad's perspective, it is the end of the hunt where she turns into prey once again, despite her wish to be a hunter. At the very end, despite the meticulous act of refining Shahrazad, and saving her from a set of social constructions, someone ruins everything. We argue that that 'someone' is Shahriyar, who represents patriarchal society and its demands of women.

This poem represents Akın's ideas concerning the social position of women. In her poems, she keeps trying to leave the indoors and become a part of the street, reaching for the sky. She claims that women are forced to obey moral rules, contend with male egoism and poverty, and thus content themselves with the little joys of life. The woman who spends her life without love and spiritual satisfaction has to survive a deeply rooted sense of solitude and melancholy (Yalçın 2010a: 62–63). In her essay about the creativity of women, she states that women are generally driven out of the realm of production. They are given secondary duties and brought up accordingly. They are trained to be submissive and tame. They are expected to be chosen, to be loved, but not to choose or to love. Hence, they are kept away from the creative realm, as it is seen as a form of revolt, especially when the creative process is enacted by women. The modern woman fights against traditional gender roles and assumptions, and thus in turn faces more oppression and prohibition, which drives her to depression and sorrow (Akın 2001: 68–73). This dynamic is present in the poem as well. Shahrazad

tries her best throughout the poem, but the last line hints at her disappointment, or sense of defeat, before society.

CONCLUSION

The two Shahrazad poems are written by two important poets of Turkish literature, who are of the same era but represent different and opposing literary and political ideologies. Our question is why these two poets chose the *Nights*, or particularly Shahrazad, to incorporate in their work. We can think of two possible answers. The first one is a rather technical one and relates to the largely ignored part of literary endeavour, that is literary markets. Our position is that by the time these two poems were written, new translations of the *Nights* had been recently published. Selâmi Münir Yurdatap's new translation of the *Nights* was published in 1950, only three years before Karakoç's poem. In 2001, Alim Şerif Onaran's translation from French was published by the same publishing house, which also publishes Akın's poems. It was highly promoted, with special emphasis on it being the first unabridged translation of the compilation. Thus, we may assume that this new translation caught Akın's attention and inspired her poem a few years later. Taking into account their own remarks about reading, and how closely they follow newly published books and translations (Yalçın 2010b: 586; Akın 2001: 92–94), we can say that the dynamics of the literary market triggered both poems.

Yet, this is not enough of an explanation on its own. Many translations are published every year and many of them are read by poets, but not all of them become a source of literary inspiration. It is obvious that the *Nights* has been and still is a source of inspiration for many well-known authors and poets all over the world, but it has been overlooked in modern Turkish literature. So, what was it that actually inspired Karakoç's and Akın's poems?

Our assumption is that the *Nights* or Shahrazad is an effective and easily managed literary theme for Turkish poets. On the one hand, these stories look like a part of tradition, but on the other, there is no poetic convention concerning them or the characters within the *Nights*. We have images of Layla, Shirin,

Zühre, and Aslı in poetry, but Shahrazad is free from such a poetic convention, and thus available to be shaped from scratch. We claim that this is the fundamental reason behind having two essentially different Shahrazads featuring both poems. Where Karakoç feels free to create a 'beloved' out of Shahrazad—an almost mystical one—Akın draws a portrait of a female defeated by social order. Both poets are free from the ball and chain of the poetic tradition: as there is no poetic tradition that says Shahrazad cannot be a holy beloved, there is also none that commands that she was not fighting against the established values of the patriarchal system either. Through different visions of Shahrazad, Karakoç could practice what he preaches about the duty of the poet, which is to enrich the poetic repertoire with new images and metaphors, while Akın devised a soulmate to tell stories and converse with through the dark nights of her poetry. Both poets, it seems, benefit from the lack of poetic tradition around Shahrazad, and take the liberty to interpret her image. It is obvious that, though neglected for a long time, the *Nights* have great potential to become an integral part of the poetic repertoire within modern Turkish literature.

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